An Inaugural Thesis

By

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On Miliary Fever.

It is the opinion of Dr Caldwell, the judicious annotator of Dr Cullen's First lines of the Practice of Physic, that Miliary Fever is a disease, very little, if at all, known in this County, and that he is yet to be convinced of its existence amongst us. That it does exist, however, I am convinced from personal observation. It is, principally, to be met with, in those portions of our Western and even Middle States, where the land is unproductive and thinly inhabited, and where the people are extremely ignorant on all subjects, but more particularly on every thing relating to our profession. It is in such parts of our County that skilful Practitioners are rarely to be found, and where the

bare-faced pretenders of our art, having none at all, or hardly any check upon them, exert their most baneful influence upon society. And, hence, the productive sources of Miliary Fever, are, in those parts, of our otherwise happy land, ~~are~~ by no means wanting, and will be frequently found very abundant. Indeed the Practitioners of those parts of our country, to which I have alluded, chiefly consist of itinerant Quacks, and ignorant and conceited old women. Those Itinerants as they pass through our country, ~~xxxx~~ scatter their nostrums with a boldness and presumption, which can only be equalled by their ignorance and stupidity. Such practice conjoined with that, of their able coadjutors, the old

women, is too frequently the only medical aid, to which these destitute and unfortunate people can have access, since regularly-bred Practitioners can seldom obtain a competency in neighbourhoods so thinly settled and so poorly able to pay them for their services. When medicine is thus administered, by the hands of the unskilful, it is evident, that if the energetic powers of Nature do not counteract its injurious effects and restore health to the patient in spite of the accumulated obstacles, which She has to encounter, that the most injurious consequences may be expected. The practice of these persons is similar to that of the ancients. Sweating, with them was a favourite resource, and it was excited by deluging the Stomach with warm beverages and stimulating

articles taken internally, and by the application of excessive heat to the external surface. One of the consequences of this mode of treatment, is Miliary Fever. A case of which, strongly illustrative of the above observations, fell under my care during the last summer.

The following are the general symptoms and characteristic features of the disease.

It is ushered in, much after the manner of Intermittent Fever. We have chills and subsequent febrile symptoms. The chills, however are slight, and are soon followed by the febrile symptoms, which are attended by great anxiety, and depression of spirits. The fever is followed by a profuse perspiration, the odour of which, is extremely offensive. In two or three days the eruption shows itself;

at first scattered, but it soon becomes so thick as be in clusters. The eruption consists of extremely small red pimples; whose prominences, though not easily discovered by the eye on their first appearance, are however very perceptible to the touch. In a day or two after the formation of the pimples, a small vescicle is seen on the apex of each, which is at first transparent, then turbid and in a short time it becomes white, evidencing the presence of pus, and they then stand out like small globules. In a few days these globules break and as they dry, exhibit the appearance of small scales, which soon fall off: While one set of eruptions are fading away, another succeeds. The eruptions first commence on those parts of the body, which are most closely confined by the

appear; however no part of the surface is exempt from their attack, and even the hands & feet are affected.

It is stated by Thomas that the redness of the eruptions occasionally disappears and that the parts attacked become of the ordinary colour of the skin. This however I did not observe to be the case, previous to the desquamation, in the patient whom I attended with the disease last summer. While the perspiration and eruptions continue, the patient is much tormented by a disagreeable paruiency and prickling of the skin. Generally the eruption commences on the neck and breast and ultimately extends over the whole surface of the body. The integuments of the palms of the hand, and of the soles of the feet are particularly affected, and the pain and irritation there felt, is much greater than

on any other parts of the body. Which is owing to the eruptions during their inflammation, being bound down by the dense and firm or unyielding covering of the parts. And by paring away the skin after the inflammation has existed long enough in the integuments of those parts of the hands and feet already mentioned, we discover innumerable small cavities filled with pus. The skin in consequence of the severe inflammation which has existed in it, is much thickened and indurated. And its sensibility is quite, or so nearly destroyed that I have known extremely thick pieces of skin from those parts of the hands or feet, to be pared away without the slightest pain to the patient.

During the whole course of the disease, the stomach is extremely irritable, with a considerable degree of nausea. The

mildest food occasions much gastric distress, and frequently very much aggravates all the worse symptoms of the disease; and the patient finds no relief unless the offending matter be discharged from the stomach. The first notice, which the patient has of the disagreement of his food, is a considerable increase of the prickling and itching of his hands and feet, accompanied by a considerable burning sensation of those parts.

In consequence of the great heat over the whole surface and the copious flow of perspiration, the patient suffers a great deal from thirst. In consequence of the very great and continued discharge from the skin, the urinary organs are in a very inactive condition and the discharge of urine is extremely small in quantity.

In the inflammatory type of the disease there is much determination of blood to

the head, which is manifested by a flushed condition of the face, vertigo, and the incoherent talking of the patient during sleep.

There is also a considerable nervous irritability of the system, occasioning a constant motion of the muscles of the leg and of some other parts of the body.

With regard to the causes of this disease, I may observe, that like most of the other Exanthemata, it is principally of gastric origin, most usually arising from acrid and stimulating articles taken into the stomach, aided by the application of much external heat, as before mentioned.

Cullen is of opinion that the disease is always the consequence of much debility conjoined with the causes stated above, since he generally found it to attack those, who had previously lost much blood.

Such no doubt is the fact, when the disease is of the Typhoid type; but the case which I have mentioned as falling more particularly under my own observation, was of a highly inflamatory character, where the symptoms strongly indicated Venesection and other depleting remedies.

This disease is incidental to both sexes, but to females particularly and the more especially, when they are in a parturient condition.

Miliary Fever differs from the other Exanthemata, in not being, either contagious or epidemic; nor has it any determinate duration, but it may continue from three to six weeks or even longer, and the same person may have it many times.

I will now pass on to the treatment of the disease. At the first

view of the symptoms, the indications of cure appear plain and simple; but whoever meets with a severe case of this malady, will often, during its progress, find himself much embarrassed to adapt his remedies to each particular indication. Some Practitioners are of opinion, that the admission of much cool air is generally injurious in the treatment of the Exanthemata; but as the disease under consideration, may be of a highly inflammatory type, whenever such is the case, it must be obvious to every reflecting mind, that any practice which is not antiphlogistic, must be extremely hazardous and altogether deleterious to the patient.

The morbid flow of perspiration appears to be intimately associated with the eruption

as it generally precedes and accompanies it. This profuse secretion from the skin occasions great prostration of strength, and consequently the first indication is to restrain this inordinate discharge.

The second indication is to avert the progress of the eruption; and the third indication is to give tone to the system.

The first indication may be fulfilled by the following treatment. The patient's body is to be kept as cool as possible by wearing very thin apparel and as little of it as will barely suffice to cover him. A pallet is preferable to a bed, in fact a bed is almost insupportable as it keeps the patient very restless in consequence of the great accumulation of heat which is produced. When the weather is warm, all the windows and doors may be thrown open, and continued so every night, as I have not

observed any injury to result from this plan of procedure.

I come secondly, to treat of the second indication, viz the avertation of the progress of the eruption. It is observed by Thomas that Miliary eruptions, sometimes accompany inflammatory affections, when, he says, it will be necessary to have recourse to gentle aperients, or laxative clysters, but that bleeding ought never to be used. We are compelled, however, to dissent from this high authority, since it must be obvious that this practice is too inert under those circumstances, when a highly inflamatory diathesis exists; as, from observation I am convinced is sometimes the case; and then a more energetic practice must be adopted, and it will, in fact, often be found absolutely necessary to the cure of our patient. I am fully persuaded that

when the fever is of the highly inflammatory type, there is no substitute for the lancet, as not only the head but the pulse also gives evident tokens of considerable plethora. Under such circumstances Venesection will generally be required six or eight times for the reduction of the inflammatory symptoms. Next to depletion by the lancet, evacuations of the bowels will be found most important, in the management of this disease; and for this purpose I think the saline cathartics are preferable. By the copious watery stools which they produce, they exert a considerable influence in the reduction of the arterial action and calming the morbid irritability of the system and especially of the external surface. Almost any of the saline cathartics will answer very well, but perhaps the Epsom Salts would be most eligible. And also a little magnesia added

to this preparation will improve its efficacy; in consequence of the acidity, almost always exists in the stomach during this disease.

Throughout the whole course of the disease, the most cooling drinks are to be employed. Of these Seltzer Water may be used very advantageously. It is agreeable to the patient and speedily mitigates the existing irritability of the stomach.

For the relief of the constant prickling in the hands and feet, it will be found useful to bathe them frequently in very cold water.

The third indication is to give tone to the system. By the time that the morbid flow of perspiration is arrested, the irritability of the stomach moderated, and the eruption begins finally to disappear the patient will be found much debilitated and it will be ~~found~~ necessary to support and strengthen him by tonic medicines.

Of these, the chalybeates are to be preferred. They are preferable to the Peruvian Bark, since the latter, if given whilst the slightest degree of fever remains and when the irritability of the stomach is not altogether relieved, never fails to distress the patient and may produce a relapse.

Through the whole course of the disease, the utmost caution should be observed as regards diet. This should be of the lightest nature. The stomach will not, for a long time, bear animal food. During convalescence, milk and sago will be found to answer very well. Buttermilk, also, sits well on the stomach. When all the appearances of the eruptions have vanished we may allow a little boiled chicken or other meats which are easily digested; the return, however, to the accustomed diet should be extremely gradual.